DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 228 CE 067 124

AUTHOR Rasinski, Timothy; Padak, Nancy
TITLE Initiating Even Start Programs. Occasional Paper #1.
PUB DATE Dec 93
NOTE 28p.; For related papers, see CE 067 125-126.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; Adult Literacy; Basic Skills; Cooperative Programs; Coordination; Early Childhood Education; Educational Cooperation; *Literacy Education; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Education; Parenting Skills; Program Evaluation; *Program Implementation; Recruitment; State Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Even Start; *Family Literacy; Ohio

ABSTRACT

To investigate the initial experiences of the various Even Start programs in Ohio following approval and funding, a project developed a survey instrument and sent it to Even Start program directors. The survey asked directors open-ended questions aimed at getting a general description of each program and a discussion of the issues and concerns that the programs had to deal with in the initial stages. Eight programs responded. In general, directors believed they experienced significant challenges and difficulties in initiating programs. Considerable overlap was found in the types of activities seen as essential to successful initiation of the projects, including the following: hiring staff, selecting and preparing sites and purchasing equipment and essential materials, coordinating with other agencies, introducing the program to the community, and identifying and recruiting potential clients for the program. Problems were encountered in the following areas: site and staff selection, staff orientation and training, coordinating with and gaining the cooperation of related agencies, finding appropriate materials for the program, perceived unrealistic expectations and lack of support and guidance from the federal agency, and recruitment and retention of parents. Collaboration was recommended with other Even Start projects and family literacy personnel, within the program, and within the communities; being realistic about program goals was suggested. (The instrument is appended.) (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 374 228

Initiating Even Start Programs

Occasional Paper #1

December, 1993

Timothy Rasinski and Nancy Padak

Kent State University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

N Padak
T Rasinski

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE067124

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

(4071)

INITIATING EVEN START PROGRAMS

Occasional Paper #1

December, 1993

Timothy Rasinski and Nancy Padak
Kent State University

The purpose of this investigation and report is to describe the initiating process used by various Even Start Programs in Ohio in setting up their programs following approval and funding. In particular, this investigation sought to identify significant areas of concern and difficulty so that future programs might benefit from the accumulated experience of their predecessors.

This report does not attempt to judge or evaluate any of the programs that were contacted in this study. Any attempt to draw evaluative conclusions about any of the projects goes beyond the scope and intent of the study.

METHOD/APPROACH

In order to investigate the initial experiences of the various Even Start programs, we developed a survey instrument (see appendix) and sent it to the Even Start program directors. In the survey, Even Start directors were asked a variety of open-ended questions aimed at getting a general description of each program and a discussion of the various issues and concerns that the programs had to deal with in the initial set up stages. Directors were also asked to rate quantitatively the level of ease or difficulty

they experienced in establishing their projects. The survey was mailed to each Even Start site. A second survey was sent to those projects that did not respond to the initial mailing. This report represents those programs that responded to the survey.

FINDINGS

The Programs

Eight Even Start programs responded to the survey. Each program is unique in terms of the nature of the program and/or the population served. Brief descriptions are provided below to serve as a context for understanding the results.

The Toledo project began in 1989. It operated within an urban environment within the auspices of the Toledo Public Schools and served families in all the Chapter I (a federal compensatory education program) schools in Toledo. The program collaborated with the Toledo Head Start Program, which is separate from the public schools.

The Barberton project began in 1990. In this program adult basic, parenting, and preschool education are combined to move low income families toward self-sufficiency. Parents participate in adult basic and literacy education classes while their preschool children are involved in a developmentally appropriate preschool. Once each week, parents interact with their children in the preschool room and participate in age appropriate activities. Parents participate in group activities once or twice a week. Even

Start outreach workers visit families in their homes providing activities that will help parents as their children's first teachers. ES families benefit from the medical, social, and mental health services available under one roof at the Decker Center.

The Kettering "Full Circle Family Reading Program," located in Montgomery County just south of Dayton, began in 1991. The project currently serves approximately 40 families of which approximately half are of limited English proficiency. The project operates within a central facility with preschool services, ABLE classes, Parenting/Pact classroom, and the ES office under one roof. The ES program supplements existing ECE and ABLE programs with parent support time and home visits.

The Cleveland project, begun in 1992, also serves an urban population. The project has served approximately 70 inner-city families at 2 elementary school sites, one on the East side that is predominantly African-American and one on the near West wide that is predominantly Hispanic-American. The classes in the project meet twice a week for 2 1/2 hour sessions. Parents and preschool children meet separately for part of each session and are together for parent-child activities for another part of each session. A unique aspect of the project is the parent-centered curriculum, which integrates parenting and basic skills using whole language methods. Parents help determine the topics to be explored. Parents keep journals and portfolios to record and

reflect on their involvement and progress in the program.

The Laurel Oaks/Live Oaks Even Start project serves Clinton, Highland, Fayette, and Clermont Counties and was begun in 1991. The program is centered on 2 vocational school campuses and offers a 25-hour career exploration component as well as the core ES components (ABLE, early childhood education, parent training, and parent/child developmental activities). In addition, the program provides academic life skills training, career skills assessment, evaluation, career counseling, and computer literacy training. The program serves a largely rural population.

The Northwest Local Schools Even Start program began in 1992 and serves 3, 4, and 5-year old children and their families in a very rural Appalachian area. The program is completely home based, except for occasional parent activities. Currently the program serves 14 families. The project collaborates closely with ABLE, Head Start, and preschool programs for children with handicaps.

The Wayne County Even Start project serves a rural and small city population. The program includes 4 sites and works in collaboration with ABLE, 0-3 child care, Head Start, and public school preschools and elementary schools. Although there is county-wide collaboration and support for the 4 centers, each is unique in its collaborations with supporting organizations.

The Lakewood Even Start program, begun in 1991, serves a population that is economically and ethnically diverse. A large number of the families served are in single parent households with few extended family ties and with many basic needs unsatisfied. Through the ESL classes the project also serves new immigrants from the Middle East, Asia, and Eastern Europe. These families are largely intact and share strong family and religious values. The Lakewood ES project has served 87 families, 91 adults and 164 children.

In sum, the major goals of the various ES programs seem to be the same: to provide a wide range of academic and life skills assistance to families most in need of such support. The programs differ in their demographic characteristics. Several programs serve urban areas while others address the needs of a more rural population. The programs also differ in the agencies with which they collaborate, the manner in which they house their programs, and the specific methods chosen to provide services to their clients.

All of the programs are relatively new. As they mature, the diverse nature of the programs will provide substantive information concerning optimal ways for addressing the needs of the various populations served. In the meantime, however, the present programs do not have the advantage of learning from programs that have preceded them. In many ways, these programs are the pathfinders to the success of future ES and family literacy programs.

Initiating the Projects

In this section of the paper we report on significant aspects of initiating the various ES projects. We asked each project director to rate the level of ease experienced in getting the project off the ground. We used a 1-5 rating scale with 1 indicating few or no problems and 5 indicating significant difficulty experienced. Of the 8 reporting programs 1 gave a rating of 2, 2 rated the initiating process at 3, 2 gave a 4 rating, 2 a 4.5 rating, and 1 a 4.9 rating. The mean rating for the 8 projects was 3.7. These ratings suggest that, in general, the ES project directors believed they experienced significant challenges and difficulties in initiating their programs. In the remaining part of this section we describe the process the programs employed in initiating their projects.

The Toledo program described the process as "like the blind leading the blind." Key questions such as who to serve and how to connect with potential clients were the initial problems that Toledo faced.

Because of the existence of the Decker Family Development Center and the collaboration with other programs that it afforded, the Barberton program reported that it was able to make a relatively smooth start in its ES program.

For the Cleveland program, the 6-week period immediately after funding was filled with selecting staff and looking at sites simultaneously. Once this was accomplished, training sessions were held for staff on whole

language, home visits, journal keeping, and portfolio assessment. The Family Life program, which existed prior to ES, provided resource people and materials that the ES program could build upon. Moreover, most ES staff came from Family Life and had worked together before on a state pilot project involving whole language for ABE. Coordinating and collaborating throughout the community were not essential for start-up as this had been previously accomplished with the Family Life program.

The initial steps for the Kettering program involved developing written information about ES and meeting with personnel from related programs (e.g., ABLE, Chapter I) to gain support in planning and recruiting. Second, the ES program met with other community service organizations (e.g., schools, human service agencies, literacy council) in order to set up referral routes between ES and the other organizations. Third, staff was hired for the ES program and trained in working with adult learners, ESL populations, and evaluation processes.

The Great Oaks program prepared a fact sheet for agencies and fliers for clients. The program made contacts with and distributed literature and registration forms to libraries, schools, and other human service agencies in the 4 counties impacted by the project. Publicity on the program was sent to a variety of media in the area. Representatives of various agencies were invited to serve on an ES advisory committee. Materials for the program were

requisitioned and purchased. Two ES staff members attended implementation training at the National Center for Family Literacy in Louisville. Finally, as applications for enrollment were received, two staff members followed up with home visits. The Great Oaks program found that delays in site preparation (e.g., getting carpet laid), purchasing, and hiring were particularly difficult and caused program alterations to meet the circumstances.

The Northwest Local Schools ES program had to initially revise its project grant. It hired 2 staff members, who met with the local school staff and personnel from other collaborative organizations in order not to duplicate service. Finally, the program began to recruit families.

Initial activities for the Wayne county program included securing sites, hiring staff, including 8 family educators, 3 child care aides, and a secretary, purchasing equipment and materials, training staff (provided by staff from the National Center for Family Literacy and held at the Wooster site for all ES staff and collaborating agency personnel), developing policies and procedures, developing marketing strategies (newspaper, flyers, community presentations), holding an open house, recruiting clients, and starting classes and home visits.

The Lakewood ES program began by hiring administrators and defining responsibilities for each individual. This permitted several activities to occur simultaneously. These tasks included identifying and recruiting participants,

purchasing materials, preparing facilities, and initiating publicity.

In sum, the initiating phase of the various ES projects was viewed, in general, as challenging. Some programs experienced greater difficulty and frustration than others. Nevertheless, despite the great variety in the nature of the programs, there seems to be considerable overlap in the types of activities that were seen as essential to successful initiation of the projects (see Table 1). These included **hiring staff members; selecting and preparing sites and purchasing equipment and essential materials; coordinating/networking with other related agencies, introducing the program to the community, and defining responsibilities of the program especially when there was potential overlap with other agencies; and identifying and recruiting potential clients for the program.** These tasks were especially daunting because they had to be accomplished by programs that, in many cases, were not adequately staffed at this stage or, if staff existed, not adequately trained to meet the needs of the program. Complicating this stage of the project for many programs was the lack of a previous experience or a model upon which the programs could base their own actions and decisions. As suggested earlier, in many ways these programs are the "trailblazers" that can inform and assist future programs.

Problems and Solutions

In the next section of the paper we describe what the various ES sites perceived as significant problems in the project initiation process and how those problems were overcome.

The Toledo program felt that meshing guidelines with the various related programs (e.g., Head Start, Chapter I) was a concern. In addition, the program staff felt that ES guidelines were difficult to understand. Staff members often questioned whether certain activities were appropriate and allowable under the ES rules. They felt little connection between the local projects and Washington. At the same time, the national evaluation was viewed as cumbersome with limited, if any, usefulness to the project itself. Space was a continuing concern for the program, especially in the schools.

For the Barberton program the first problem encountered was providing transportation and child care for the low income families that participated in the program. These problems were overcome by revising the grant to allow for the leasing of a van for transportation. Similarly, a contract with the Department of Human Services helped with child care needs.

The Cleveland project encountered several problems. One problem was recruiting for the West side site, since it was not easily accessible for the parents whose children were bussed from the other side of the city. Second,

because the program attracts more parents with school children than parents with preschoolers, the program works closely with Chapter I teachers to help school-age children. The recruitment of families with preschool children has been a continuing problem. Third, despite considerable effort in networking with related agencies, the project had difficulty in developing collaborative relationships with these groups. The sense of "turf" that exists with many agencies is a hindrance to fruitful collaboration. Fourth, the selection of appropriate tests to reflect the parenting aspect of the project has been difficult. Parents were upset about being required to take the Reading Comprehension and Problem Solving sections of the ABLE test. Finally, finding school sites that have sufficient space and that provide a "welcoming" atmosphere for parents and families has been a continuing problem.

Like Barberton, Kettering also encountered difficulty in finding transportation for participants. This was overcome by revising the budget and providing stipends for transportation or bus tokens. Child care, too, has been a significant concern. Although partially addressed by the program purchasing slots at area day care facilities, this is not viewed as a completely satisfactory solution.

For the Live Oaks program, dealing with the bureaucracy of a large regional vocational school has been a great frustration and has resulted in many delays. The school district's renovation of space for the program was months

behind schedule. Delays with materials on order were experienced. Teachers and directors were not hired until 2 weeks before the start-up of the program, thereby providing little opportunity for inservice education in setting up classrooms and making home visits. Aides were hired to begin the "next day" with no opportunity for orientation.

The Northwest Local School program experienced difficulties with facilities that did not allow center-based activities. This was addressed by implementing a home-based program. Secondly, staffing was somewhat of a problem. Originally the program was informed that, according to ES legislation, there were no certification requirements for staff. After hiring the kindergarten staff, it was learned that preschool certification was needed because of ODE early childhood education requirements. This will be addressed through additional coursework.

For the Wayne County program, dealing with the multitude of tasks simultaneously in establishing a new program was a large problem that was addressed by assigning responsibility for tasks to various staff members. This has been a successful solution because it has allowed individuals to become experts within particular areas of the project. Finally, recruiting and follow through with parents in Wooster, the largest site, has been a problem. The program is planning a large outreach to attract parents.

The Lakewood project experienced delays in hiring the Director and Assistant Director and dealing with the

unrealistic expectations that the program would become operational within 2 weeks after their hire. This problem was addressed by developing a team/committee approach to dealing with individual tasks that needed to be accomplished prior to launching the program. Securing an appropriate site was a second problem, since the local high school was not willing to donate space. After much work, a very appropriate site was found at the Lakewood Hospital Community Care Center. Finally, the lack of direction/orientation/assistance from the Federal administrators was a significant detriment. This was overcome when the state became responsible for the overall administration and oversight of ES.

Overall, a variety of very practical and pragmatic problems were encountered by the various projects. These included site and staff selection and staff orientation and training; coordinating with and gaining the cooperation of related agencies, especially the local school district in supporting the programs with appropriate and necessary space; finding appropriate materials for the unique nature of the program, especially in the area of assessment; perceived unrealistic expectations and lack of support and guidance from the federal agency; and recruitment and retention of parents, including provisions for transportation and child care.

The programs seemed to have dealt with these problems forcefully and with initiative and imagination, even if not

all the problems have been satisfactorily resolved. When they lacked support in finding space, programs either looked elsewhere or changed the nature of the program so that clients could be served at home. When accessibility to sites was a problem, programs were altered to provide transportation to sites. It appears that one of the most important solutions to the inevitable problems that programs faced was to **develop as early as possible a clear vision of what the program was about, who it served, and in what ways. Programs then organized themselves quickly to create that vision and address the various problems in an informed and rational manner.**

SUGGESTIONS/ADVICE

In this section we relate suggestions and advice that the existing programs would offer to new projects. The following chart summarizes the suggestions and categorizes them under topical headings.

1. Collaborate with other ES projects and family literacy personnel.
    a. Meet frequently to clarify expectations and brainstorm solutions to problems.
    b. Keep in close contact with state coordinator.
    c. Seek resources from other programs, state agencies, universities, etc.
    d. Seek "mentors" among established ES programs.
2. Collaborate within your own program.
    a. Pull staff together frequently; work at

creating a cohesive team; commit yourselves to functioning as a team.

b. Organize staff; assign specific tasks and responsibilities; make sure everyone knows what everyone else is doing.

c. Find outside resource people (e.g., social workers, school personnel) who can assist when needed.

d. Work together to find additional funding for ES efforts.

3. Collaborate within your communities.

a. Decide with whom and how your ES program should collaborate. Convince these persons/agencies of the importance of ES and project goals.

b. Invest time in establishing these collaborative relationships early in your project before writing the proposal. Work to make these relationships strong and flexible.

c. Communicate frequently with these agencies. Seek their advise and input.

d. "Advertise" the existence of your program to the local community through the media, fliers, and talks.

4. Be realistic about program goals.

a. Decide how many families and the age range of children (infants and toddlers, preschool,

inschool) that can realistically be served.

b. Realize that delays and unanticipated problems are inevitable and that program start up will take a great deal of time and energy. Don't get discouraged. Develop a plan for addressing unanticipated concerns.

c. Hire staff as quickly as possible. Be aware of the formal and informal requirements for staff. Plan staff development opportunities carefully. Obtain help from others.

d. Continually review program objectives to be certain that progress is being made. Develop informal system to insure that program objectives are being addressed. Keep a "paper trail" documenting progress.

e. Plan recruiting strategies carefully and early. Involve other agencies.

SUPPORT REQUIRED BY ES PROGRAMS

In this last section we discuss the needs and requirements identified by existing ES programs to ensure successful implementation.

The Toledo program noted the need for help in developing teams and in working collaboratively within and between programs. For example, state meetings for staff from a variety of programs are successful support activities. Northwest Local also supports the notion of

opportunities for programs to come together to "talk and discuss what is happening elsewhere in the state and nation."

The Barberton ES program feels that support from experienced programs would be very helpful for beginning ES programs. The Cleveland, Kettering, and Wayne programs echo and extend these sentiments by suggesting the development of mentoring relationships between new and existing programs. Cleveland and Kettering also suggest that a resource clearinghouse to aid in the identification and selection of materials and other resources would be a major help to new programs.

Cleveland adds that developing specialized, practical training for staff and helping new programs develop a better sense of existing and future ES requirements would be helpful to new programs. Similarly, Kettering believes that the support of a strong state coordinator to assist in program development is essential to new programs. Reiterating Kettering's comments, Great Oaks notes the importance of a supportive and informed state administrator. Both Kettering and Great Oaks note that Connie Ackerman has been extremely helpful in their program implementation.

Great Oaks stresses the need to get the cooperation and assistance from other related agencies, especially the executive level administration of the sponsoring agency. Lakewood also urges the need for support from all levels -- administrative support from higher offices, support from

community and other agencies in it, and support and encouragement from other Even Start Programs. Wayne County notes, however, that cooperation with other agencies may sometimes be difficult as the ES program may be viewed as a competitor for future grant dollars. Great Oaks also suggests that an advisory committee provide guidance and direction to new programs.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

After having read and distilled the information presented by the ES programs from around the state we now summarize and present our conclusions to this study.

Initiating an Even Start program is an extremely challenging task. It requires the completion of many diverse and seemingly unrelated tasks, often with a limited and/or insufficiently trained staff. Had the programs been able to anticipate more fully the various concerns and tasks that they faced, program initiation would have proceeded with significantly less frustration and anxiety.

Establishing and nurturing connections with and among the Even Start programs is the key to successful initiation. Vertical connections to the state office for support is vital. Similarly, establishing early connections with potential clients ensures that the program can identify immediate client needs and begin to serve its stated purpose as soon as possible.

Horizontal connections are also critical to successful program initiation. These include connections with well

established ES programs that have already had to address many of the same problems faced by the new programs and connections with related agencies in the community that can aid new ES programs in many of their pragmatic needs and concerns.

We suggest the following actions be taken to promote more successful initiation of ES programs and to overcome problems faced by ES programs in the initiation phase of their projects.

1. The state coordinator should continue to sponsor informational meetings for agencies planning to submit ES proposals. The meetings should include information about the immediate needs in initiating a project once funding is approved. Moreover, the critical need for preapplication planning and coordination should be stressed.

2. Even Start proposals must provide written, detailed descriptions of the aspects of program design and delivery listed below. The results of this study might be shared with proposal evaluators. Those evaluating proposals should be alerted to the importance of concrete, logical, and reasonable plans in these areas.

a) Staff organization, needs, and responsibilities.

b) Recruitment plans and strategies.

c) Interagency collaboration plans.

d) Site selection plans, including accessibility, transportation, and child care.

3. State leadership is crucial. The state coordinator should continue to provide periodic information sessions for new ES programs in which critical items are discussed, information is shared, and presentations on pertinent topics are made by established programs.

4. The state coordinator should continue developing and supporting the mentoring system between newly approved and established programs.

5. The state coordinator should attempt to provide ES programs with a clearer discussion of ES guidelines, especially the connection between ES, Chapter I, and Head Start programs.

6. The state coordinator should attempt to coordinate the accumulation and dissemination of information about technical topics related to ES (e.g., family literacy methods of instruction, early childhood literacy, developmentally appropriate assessment). A clearinghouse format and/or a periodic statewide conference would help to facilitate this.

7. The state coordinator should promote the ongoing and systematic collection of data related to the initiation and development of ES programs in Ohio and disseminate the findings of this ongoing study with ES programs. This data collection program should focus on information and insights regarding interagency collaborations and successes in recruitment and retention.

Many of these recommendations have been implemented or

are in the process of implementation. Thus, we should expect significant improvement in start-up for future ES programs.

In the final analysis, the key to successful implementation of new ES programs is extensive and comprehensive planning. Persons responsible for preparing ES proposals and guiding the initiation of projects must be informed of the specific and critical areas in which to plan, potential areas of difficulty, and the need to develop contingency plans.

Table 1

Major Tasks Encountered During Project Initiation

Tasks	Projects
Staff Related	
Selecting Staff	5
Training Staff	3
Defining Responsibilities	1
Recruitment	
Deciding who to serve	3
Developing written information	5
Interagency Collaboration	3
Site Selection/Preparation	3
Materials/Equipment Selection and Purchase	3

APPENDIX

Survey of Ohio Even Start Programs

"Beginning a Program"

Please answer the following questions as completely and descriptively as you can. We plan to use the information you provide in developing a paper on "Beginning New Programs" that will be shared with other programs throughout the state. (Please use the back side if you need more room)

1. Program Location: _____

2. Program Coordinator: _____

3. Date Program Began: _____

4. Person Completing this Form: _____

5. Please describe your program (describe the population you serve and its size as well as any unique or unusual characteristics of your program):

6. Describe how you initiated your program once it was funded (what did you do, in what order, and why?):

7. What problems or obstacles did you encounter as you began to initiate your program? For each problem/obstacle identified, tell us a) what you did to deal with it, and b) how successful you were in solving the problem or overcoming the obstacle.

8. Given 20/20 hindsight, what would you do differently to provide for a better beginning to your program?

9. What advice would you offer to other programs that were just beginning their Even Start programs?

10. What kind of support do beginning Even Start programs need?

11. On a scale of 1 - 5 (1 being very easily implemented with few problems, and 5 being many problems were encountered in implementation), how would you rate the ease you had in beginning your program?

_____